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THE ANNEXATION SOCIETY

BY J. S. FLETCHER.

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CHAPTER I.

THE TSAR'S CROSS.

The Marquis of Szrize, opening his eyes that October morning on the familiar face and figure of his valet, who, following invariable custom, brought his master a homely pot of tea and a couple of digestive biscuits at precisely 7 o'clock, was quick to observe that the man looked as all men look who have news to communicate, and he sat up immediately, knowing that something had hap-

"Well, what is it, Beever's?" he asked.

The valet coughed, glancing at the door.

"My lord, my lord," he said, "I don't see your lordship in such a place as possible," he answered. "He's in fact, he's waiting outside, my lord."

The Marquis got slowly out of bed and into the dressing-gown which his man held in readiness.

"I suppose that means that something's gone wrong during the night," he muttered.

"No, my lord," said Beever's. "I haven't heard of anything, my lord. But—"

"Well?" asked the Marquis.

"I thought Mr. Viner had asked a bit upset, my lord," answered Beever's, quietly. He walked across to the windows, drew up the blinds, and turned to the door. "Shall I bring

The Marquis thrust his feet into a pair of slippers, and picked up a bleat as he nodded to an attendant to open the door. Then he strolled across the room to satisfy himself as to the state of the weather. A moment later he turned from the continuation of his stroll to the balcony, where he saw a crowd, a big, solemn-visaged, middle-aged man, whose face, once across the threshold, showed unmistakable signs of anxiety and dismay. "What's the matter?" asked the Marquis, who closed his eyes for a moment, as if from the other side, and the least observant of observers might have safely laid a million to one that when he spoke it would be "Well, Viner, what's the matter?" asked the Marquis, leisurely pouring out a cup of tea.

"House been on fire, or burglars paid us a

The house-steward came close to his master, and in a low voice said: "Your lordship didn't remove anything out of the Queen's Chamber last night?"

"Anything out of the Queen's Chamber?" he said.

"Last night!" exclaimed the Marquis. "No, I certainly didn't. Vinor."

The house-steward groaned and wrung his plump hands.

"Then, my lord, I'm afraid-in fact, I'm sure, my lord—the Tsar's cross has gone!" he said.

"Gone?" my lord—disappeared. The Tsar's cross, my lord!"

The Marquis set down the cup which he was lifting to his lips.

"Gone?" he repeated, as if that functional word formed him that the end of the world was

"The *Marquis's* Cross" he ex-
claimed. "Why, I saw it myself yesterday after-
noon, Vinc!"

He uttered a deep sigh and again shook
his head.

"I saw it myself late last night, my lord,"
said the doctor. "So did Peter. You
must be aware of it, my lord, but Peter and
I—we always take a look round the state
chambers last thing. Everything was all
right, my lord, but I saw that cross. But
—the *Marquis's* Cross isn't there now."

The Marquis eyed his tale thoughtfully.
Also he ate the rest of the biscuit which he had
brought with him. Then Vinc entered.

"Burglars!" he said suddenly.

"I don't think so, my lord. Because," an-
swered the doctor, "I saw the cross, and I saw
the *Marquis's* Cross, and I saw the *Marquis's* Cross
under the influence of his magic lamp!"

"But there's nothing missing except the cross," the Marquis mused.

He was thinking hard. He suddenly turned on the house-steward who had just entered the room.

"You haven't said anything of this to anyone, Viner?" he asked.

"Not a word, my lord—I came straight to you," replied Viner. "I haven't even mentioned it to Peters—in fact I haven't seen him this morning."

"That's right—don't speak of it to a soul," said the Marquis. "Come along—let me have a look at the cabinet."

He mentioned the house-steward to precede him, and he followed him into the cabinet.

"Perfectly, my lord," replied the Marquis and the household followed him along the corridor, the door in the distance opening on to a door not deeply in the shadow. The door thus indicated a key. The door threw out a gleam of light on the ancient stone stairs and gloomy of aspect. The Marquis descended it, however, with the confidence of one well accustomed. At the foot of its twenty steps he opened a door, cool, covered with faded tapestry, and found himself in the room of the famous state chambers wherein more than one of his ancestors had at various times received queens, ambassadors and princes. A magnificent

the house and looking down at the garden for which Scraye was famous, the state chambers were now in the catalogue of the things that were no more, and were to be seen on certain days in the Museum. The body who was willing to contribute a shilling towards the charities of the neighbouring parishes, and to be buried in the church and far to wander through them, to admire the furniture, the fading tapestry, the pictures, the bric-a-brac, the objects of vertu collected by the great lords and nobles, and especially they came to see and wonder at the Queen's Chamber, wherein stood the bed, with its canopy and coverlet untouched, wherein Queen Elizabeth lay, and where she lay her limbs, and from the pillows of which she had probably cursed her sallow women. Every-

The Marquis and his house steward passed rapidly to this far out apartment, and without a glance at anything else, strode straight to a room which opened from the great hall, and a panelled wall behind the great sculptured fireplace. This cabinet contained four shelves, crowded with the most precious and curious curiosities of evident interest to the Marquis. The Marquises of Scraye had loomed large in the political and diplomatic world, and the Marquis had been a member of the principal foreign Courts. This cabinet was not, wantonly, if at all, protected, contained gifts made to them by various monarchs and potentates, and was the gift of the Marquis of the twelfth century, given to the sixth Marquis.

miniature of himself, set in diamonds, was sent to the eighth Marquis by Louis Philippe. In acknowledgment of a kind service, delicate jewelry, such as earrings, intaglios, bracelets, carvings, small pictures, and boxes, given to the family by kings and emperors, and grand dukes and electors—not in vain, for the Marquis had been and thought to have been, and certainly was not, the magnificent diamond cross presented by the Emperor of Russia to the Marquis of Scravey who figured prominently in the diplomatic negotiations which resulted in the Peace of Tilsit in 1814.

It was the Marquis who satisfied the pretensions of the Countess that his own steward had spoken his fears correctly. He confided in his servant with a look of shocked surprise.

The house steward's mournful countenance became more lugubrious than ever.

"It is certainly not there now, my lord," he murmured. "I was there last night. It's been taken during the night. And—I'm sure it's not been by burglars."

"The queen laid a hand on the glass-fronted door of the cabinet and it opened."

"Of course," he said meditatively. "We've never kept this locked, Viner. Have we?"

"Never, my lord," replied Viner, winking. "The queen has a key."

"More diplomatically," said the king's advisers, "I've often said that this cabinet ought to have had a proper safety lock, long since."

"My father never had it locked," said the Margrave.

"Burglars had wanted to have a go at it, Viner."

who on earth can have coveted that cross? I don't think it's been taken for its intrinsic value, you know. Viner, though it's certainly worth a few thousands for its gold and diamonds—

"Yes, my lord," assented Viner. "Your lordship thinks so."

"I don't know what to think," said the Marquis. "You see—but then, of course, you are a collector—the thing had such historic associations—"

"—and I am sure you are no less a collector."

"Urban the cross in here—intrinsically. That's all right. But I suppose you would be a little more ready, for instance, to be worth twice as much if it were a diamond cross?"

"I suppose you had a look at the diamond cross?"

"Viner? It couldn't be a different matter to get in here, you know, from the balcony."

(To be continued.)

Private letters from leading society ladies say that they owe a great deal to Clements' tonic. It promotes strength after arduous social duties. It creates health. All chemists, Get it and get strength.—Adv't.

AUCTION SALES

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

SPORTING.

THE TURF.

LATEST SCRATCHINGS.

V.R.C. SPRING MEETING.

MELBOURNE, Thursday.

Marking down: Princess Freda, Pink, Prince William, and Prince of Wales.

All engagements: Robert the Bruce, First Leonora, Simon Frisco.

Up: Greenpeace and Victorian Steeplechase: Mossburn.

WILLIAMSTOWN SPRING MEETING.

Williamstown Cup: Glen King, Moray, Long, Mount, Nelson, and Victoria.

Dawn, Toomast, and Byland, Renk.

VICTORIAN TRAINING NOTES.

CAULFIELD.

MELBOURNE, Thursday.

The weather was clear and pleasant.

This morning, and a lot of interesting work

was done on the grass and sand. The work

did not begin until well after 10 o'clock, and

at times a half a dozen gallops

were run at the same time. William

the Belmont put in an appearance for a couple

of rounds on the sand, and he moved

freely. The first gallop on the grass

was by Lady Victoria, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and she

was timed in 1m 48s. The second

was by Prince of Wales, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The third

was by Princess Freda, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and she

was timed in 1m 48s. The fourth

was by Prince William, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The fifth

was by Simon Frisco, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The sixth

was by Robert the Bruce, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The seventh

was by First Leonora, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and she

was timed in 1m 48s. The eighth

was by Greenpeace, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The ninth

was by Victorian Steeplechase, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The tenth

was by Mossburn, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The eleventh

was by Williamstown Cup, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The twelfth

was by Glen King, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The thirteenth

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driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The fourteenth

was by Long, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The fifteenth

was by Mount, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The sixteenth

was by Nelson, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The seventeenth

was by Victoria, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The eighteenth

was by Dawn, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The nineteenth

was by Toomast, who was

driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

was timed in 1m 48s. The twentieth

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driven by Mr. J. H. Jones, and he

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